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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IR](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: SENATOR KERRY'S MEETING WITH QATAR'S PRIME MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) told Senator John Kerry February 13 that we will all lose us 4-6 months of time in pursuing the recently announced "proximity talks" between the Israelis and Palestinians.

-- HBJ underscored that it is a mistake to ignore Hamas in seeking a lasting agreement.

-- From Qatar's perspective, there are differences in style and approaches between the two wings of Hamas, but in principle both are fundamentally aligned. Hamas leaders in Damascus and Gaza can accept recognition of Israel, but must calibrate the timing very carefully because Hamas supporters are not ready for this change.

-- According to HBJ, Egypt has a vested interest in dragging out Palestinian reconciliation talks for as long as possible. Egypt "has no end game; serving as broker of the talks is Egypt's only business interest with the U.S."

-- The Prime Minister suggested that one or two GCC members, Morocco, and Syria form the core membership of an Arab League committee to address Palestinian-Israeli concerns. Giving Syria a role would create jealousy among the Arabs, which HBJ said would help the U.S. move talks forward.

-- HBJ said putting economic pressure on Iran by targeting its oil revenues is the best way to get Tehran to rethink its quest for nuclear weapons. For the sanctions to work, it would be vital that Russia and other countries bordering Iran implement them fully.

End Key Points.

11. (C) The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), Senator John Kerry (D-MA), accompanied by Ambassador, P/E Chief and SFRC staff Frank Lowenstein and Fatema Sumar, met February 13 with Prime Minister (and Foreign Minister) of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ). HBJ opened the meeting by observing that President Obama's presidency had brought a lot of optimism to the region. Senator Kerry agreed, adding that now we "need to deliver."

PROXIMITY TALKS NOT HELPFUL

12. (C) HBJ expressed dissatisfaction that "everyone in the region" seems to have a separate plan for moving ahead on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute when only one plan was needed -- a plan that both the Israelis and Palestinians would accept and finalize. More disconcerting to Qatar, he said, was the

announcement by Special Envoy Mitchell that both parties would now engage in "proximity talks." Such talks "will lose us 4-6 months of time," stated HBJ.

13. (C) Senator Kerry responded that we "are where we are." He assessed that the Goldstone Report and dissatisfaction in Fatah's ranks in the West Bank made it difficult for Abu Mazen to "give something to Israel" that would allow direct negotiations to begin between the parties. Add in Abu Mazen's previous statements on the need for a full settlement freeze, and the ingredients for the Palestinian people to accept direct talks simply are not there.

14. (C) Abu Mazen is out on a limb, responded HBJ. "He climbed a tree (drawing a line in the sand on settlements) and can't get down." HBJ suggested that President Obama's address to the UN General Assembly at the opening of its current session could serve as a "roadmap" forward: two states (Israel and Palestine) remain the goal, and the establishment of settlements must stop while negotiations take place. HBJ stressed again that the "proximity talks" will cause a "lot of problems."

NEED FOR PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION

15. (C) HBJ told Chairman Kerry he had met recently in Doha with an Israeli delegation and had encouraged them to work with Palestinians of all stripes in the pursuit of peace. HBJ underscored that it is a mistake to work with just one partner, Fatah, and ignore Hamas. Saying this does not mean

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that Qatar expresses a preference for Hamas. HBJ pointed out that Abu Mazen had taught in Qatar for 30 years and remains a friend of Qatar. Qatar has no differences with him or those around him, but the Palestinian Authority (PA) cannot sign off on an agreement on behalf of the Palestinians where open divisions exist.

16. (C) HBJ noted that in conversations Qatar has held with Hamas' leadership, it is clear that Hamas is ready to accept Israel's right to exist. But the acceptance must come about gradually, not in one day. Senator Kerry said he had heard this elsewhere, but in his own conversations in Damascus -- where a many leaders of Hamas reside -- he did not get the sense that Hamas was ready to accept Israel's existence.

17. (C) Qatar's PM observed that the biggest obstacle on the Palestinian side to an eventual agreement with Israel is the reconciliation of Hamas and Fatah. HBJ maintained that it would have happened during the previous U.S. administration, but President Bush told Abu Mazen not to sign off on it. Now, said HBJ, progress is slow, and bringing the two parties together in the spirit of reconciliation is hampered by Arab politics. Reconciliation can happen, HBJ asserted, but only "if bigger countries in the region allow it."

8, (C) Senator Kerry, noting that he had seen Yasser Arafat make the transition from PLO fighter to signer of an agreement on the White House lawn, observed that people can come around and change their position. But was that the case here? The Senator asked HBJ if the differences at play between Hamas' leaders in Damascus and Gaza were too wide to bridge.

19. (C) From HBJ's perspective, there are differences in style and approaches between the two wings of Hamas, but in principle both are fundamentally aligned. They can accept recognition of Israel, but have to calibrate the timing very carefully because Hamas knows that its supporters in the Palestinian territories are not ready for this change. HBJ said Hamas leaders in Damascus and Gaza are aligned on wanting to open the border crossing at Rafah, for example, but differ on tactics in reaching this goal. The leaderships

in Syria and Gaza consult each other, and no one leader in Hamas can take a decision alone, reported HBJ.

EGYPT INTERESTED IN THE PROCESS, NOT RESULTS

¶10. (C) Chairman Kerry asked HBJ if Hamas is feeling political pressure from Gazans over their current living conditions. HBJ responded that anytime people do not have housing, schools or public utilities, their political leaders feel pressure. Hamas, however, has a greater sense of urgency in reconciling with Fatah, observed HBJ, than does the broker of the talks between the Palestinian parties.

¶11. (C) According to HBJ, Egypt -- the broker -- has a vested interest in dragging out the talks for as long as possible. Egypt "has no end game; serving as broker of the talks is Egypt's only business interest with the U.S." HBJ likened the situation to a physician who has only one patient to treat in the hospital. If that is your only business, "the physician is going to keep the patient alive but in the hospital for as long as possible." HBJ emphasized that Qatar, on the other hand, is interested only in bringing about peace in the region -- and as quickly as possible.

¶12. (C) Short term, HBJ said Hamas wants to form with Fatah a unity government and rebuild the Israeli-inflicted damage in Gaza. Senator Kerry, steering the conversation toward Hamas' long-term aims, acknowledged that Qatar's leaders speak frequently with Hamas. The Chairman asked HBJ to explain why Hamas does not seem "to move when we need Hamas to move."

¶13. (C) Simply put, answered HBJ, "Hamas does not trust Egypt and the Quartet enterprise." HBJ noted that since its inception the Quartet has been anti-Hamas and aligned with the interests of Abu Mazen, Egypt and Jordan. These partners of the Quartet, observed HBJ, are the very partners who have not delivered a Palestinian-Israeli agreement.

¶14. (C) Returning to his theme that "peace brokers" act in their own self-interest, HBJ observed that President Mubarak of Egypt is thinking about how his son can take his place and how to stave off the growing strength of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian government, said HBJ, has jailed 10,000 Muslim Brotherhood members without bringing court cases against them. The Egyptian "people blame America" now for their plight. The shift in mood on the ground is "mostly because of Mubarak and his close ties" to the United States.

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His only utility to the U.S. is brokering peace between Palestinians and Israelis, so he has no interest in taking himself out of the one game he has, underscored HBJ. "Tell your friends (in Egypt) they must help themselves."

¶15. (C) As for Qatar, "We want to help Abu Mazen and the Palestinians," declared HBJ. The short-term needs of Palestinians in Gaza are acute, said HBJ. We need to broker a quick reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah and move forward quickly on rebuilding Gaza. Senator Kerry asserted that HBJ was preaching to the converted and told the PM he was "shocked by what I saw in Gaza."

¶16. (C) Continuing to illustrate how Egypt had not delivered for the U.S. on Palestinian issues, HBJ said Qatar was told in late 2008 that Israel and the U.S. needed the Egyptians to deal with the crisis in Gaza. Yet former Israeli PM Olmert later complained to Qatar that Egypt is a big country and not nimble; it could not move fast enough. Senator Kerry pointed out he was in Cairo at the time Qatar was calling for an Arab League Summit in December 2008/January 2009 and asked HBJ for his perspective on the rift between Qatar and Egypt at that time.

¶17. (C) HBJ told Senator Kerry that Mubarak refused to come

to Doha for a meeting of Arab leaders, preferring that the meeting take place in Riyadh. The request to move the meeting was relayed to Qatar by the Saudis, not the Egyptians. Saudi Arabia, as a big country like Egypt, has a vested interest in keeping Egypt afloat, said HBJ. The Saudis agreed to host the meeting in Riyadh not because they objected to traveling to Doha, but because the Egyptians did. "So we argued over the meeting location" while the Palestinians suffered, and we in Qatar "called a meeting and said whoever comes, comes."

¶18. (C) Qatar is worried, said HBJ, about Egypt and its people, who are increasingly impatient. Mubarak, continued HBJ, says Al Jazeera is the source of Egypt's problems. This is an excuse. HBJ had told Mubarak "we would stop Al Jazeera for a year" if he agreed in that span of time to deliver a lasting settlement for the Palestinians. Mubarak said nothing in response, according to HBJ.

¶19. (C) Asked his advice on bringing about an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, HBJ said President Clinton recognized before leaving office that Egypt was a problem. When President Clinton sought help at the end of his term in reaching a final deal, the Saudis and Egyptians did not encourage him, said HBJ. "They told him to do what he thinks right." Culturally, said HBJ, that is the way Arabs say "you are on your own." And President Clinton was, said HBJ.

¶20. (C) Now we are at a stage, said HBJ, where Egypt does not want Arab League involvement in brokering a reconciliation agreement among the Palestinians unless the talks bog down. HBJ said he had told Abbas that climbing down from his tree on no settlement activity so that talks can go forward will require Arab support. But the Egyptians won't allow it.

¶21. (C) Asked if tabling a more specific plan for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians would help, HBJ said it would be a mistake to table a plan that is too specific. HBJ then reiterated that the problem is more with those carrying out the negotiations. "The good cooks (Egypt) have not given good food to now."

¶22. (C) Senator Kerry noted that Special Envoy Mitchell had made a lot of requests of Arabs but with little success. Leaving Qatar aside, the Chairman asked HBJ for proposed next steps. HBJ said he trusts the Saudis, but because they talk openly to Egypt and do not want to create more problems for Egypt than the Egyptian government already has, it is essential to bring in the small countries and start there.

¶23. (C) HBJ suggested one or two GCC members, Morocco (although the King there is hesitant) and Syria as the core membership of an Arab League committee to address Palestinian-Israeli concerns. HBJ told Senator Kerry the inclusion of Syria might surprise him, but having Syria play a role would create jealousy among the Arabs. Some jealousy and rivalry is just what the U.S. needs, opined HBJ, to get the process moving.

IRAN AND LEBANON

¶24. (C) Turning to Iran, Senator Kerry said he understood Qatar's need to find the right balance in dealing with bigger

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neighbors, especially Iran given the natural gas field both share. Due to the working relationship Qatar maintains with Iran, the Chairman asked HBJ for his advice as the international community becomes more serious about economic sanctions against Iran.

¶25. (C) HBJ said Iran's president views the U.S. as a country that is overstretched and in difficulty as a result of too

many commitments. Iraq, Afghanistan, and the U.S. economy are the three main problems President Ahmadinejad sees. HBJ observed that a Western attack against Iran for Ahmadinejad would be good politics, because it would allow him to take out his opposition using the war as a pretext. Senator Kerry asked clarification of whether Ahmadinejad had said these things, or if HBJ inferred them from conversation.

¶26. (C) Qatar's PM said Ahmadinejad had told him, "We beat the Americans in Iraq; the final battle will be in Iran."

¶27. (C) HBJ said putting economic pressure on Iran is the best way to get the leadership to rethink its quest for nuclear weapons. To be successful, he told Senator Kerry, Russia would definitely have to be on board, as would the Central Asian countries bordering Iran that provide food and supplies.

¶28. (C) Asked his perception of the state of play with the opposition, HBJ said the U.S. had done a good job of standing back and not becoming the symbol of the opposition. Cracks in the regime are appearing. It is highly significant that many demonstrators ignored Khamenei when he called on them to stop their protests. The four key pillars of Iranian power -- the court, oil sector, imams, and Revolutionary Guards --- all must stick with him, stressed HBJ. There are cracks in the system, but the downfall of the regime may not be in the cards.

¶29. (C) Asked what the sanctions should target, HBJ said the money that Iran derives from oil. Depriving Tehran of this revenue would force the regime to negotiate.

¶30. (C) Senator Kerry observed that Ahmadinejad was making it easier by his actions. There is wide consensus in the Executive and Legislative branches of Washington to press ahead. Senator Kerry warned that Ahmadinejad "should not equate Afghanistan and Iraq with what he faces."

¶31. (C) HBJ encouraged Chairman Kerry to bear in mind that Iran is clever and makes its opponents dizzy in the quest for deals. They will keep you working on a deal and then start from scratch with a new interlocutor. HBJ stressed that Iran will make no deal. Iran wants nuclear weapons, and HBJ said he would not be surprised to see Iran test one to demonstrate to the world its achievement.

¶32. (C) On Lebanon, Senator Kerry asked if Iran and Hizballah are ratcheting up their weapons stockpiles as part of Iran's war against Israel. HBJ affirmed that is the case.

IRAQ

¶33. (C) On Iraq, HBJ told Senator Kerry that Prime Minister Al-Maliki wants a Shia state, even though the Sunnis (when you count Kurds and non-Kurds) have the majority.

¶34. (U) CODEL Kerry has cleared this message.

Lebaron